

U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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Dear Fellow Marylander:

This week, I was proud to welcome [America's Second Gentleman](#), Doug Emhoff, husband of Vice President Kamala Harris, to Annapolis. We met at the Annapolis Maritime Museum with [local restaurant owners](#) who had a rough time during the pandemic and received help through the Paycheck Protection Program that I helped establish. The PPP, as we call it, has been a lifeline for small businesses, and venues like the museum, who saw their customers and visitors vanish overnight when mandatory public health precautions kicked in to slow the spread of COVID-19.



What made this visit special was not only that we were welcoming our first Second Gentleman to Annapolis, but also that everyone at the event was able to go without a facemask. Everyone participating confirmed in advance that he or she had been vaccinated. For our discussion, we still spread out and took reasonable precautions, but we were safe to go maskless, according to the [latest guidance](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Admittedly, I had some trepidation at first, but the moment was refreshing. It had been a long-time in the making. In other situations where I do not know if everyone around me is vaccinated, I still wear a mask, following [CDC guidance](#). As always, it's for my safety and for the safety of the people around me.

Across Maryland, we have been making incredible strides recently in getting people vaccinated. As of Thursday, more than [44 percent of Marylanders](#) have received two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna shots or a single of the Johnson & Johnson version. This is an incredible improvement since January when our state was ranked 47th among the 50 states for percentage vaccinated. We had a rocky start, but once federal supplies started to increase, thanks to the efforts of the Biden-Harris administration, the number of Marylanders getting their shots increased quickly.

This week, the New York Yankees provided a textbook example of why fully vaccinated people still need to stay safe and take precautions. Nine players and staff who were fully vaccinated all [tested positive](#) for COVID-19. A vaccinated person, like second baseman Gleyber Torres, may be asymptomatic or have mild symptoms. They can still spread the disease to people who may be immunocompromised and therefore unable to get the vaccine. Researchers are learning more every day about the transmissibility of COVID-19 by fully vaccinated people, but so far, fully vaccinated people who tested positive for COVID-19 have had more mild symptoms and none has died.

To be clear, the CDC has not said that we should all ditch our masks and return to crowded spaces that, as Dr. Fauci has reminded us even after the release of the new CDC guidance, remain risky for COVID-19 transmissibility. The new guidelines for fully vaccinated people, which mostly relies on an [honor system](#), do not eliminate the need to follow federal or local rules, say when traveling by airplane, bus or other public transit like the Metro or MARC trains. You also still need to follow local rules or the rules of whatever the restaurant or business you are visiting, but you have options under certain circumstances.

[Fully vaccinated people](#) – defined as someone more than two weeks past their last vaccine dose – no longer need to keep a six-foot physical distance or wear a facemask in most outdoor or indoor situations – but they certainly can [keep wearing](#) them if they want.

If you are mixed together with people who are not vaccinated, or with people whose status is unclear, wearing a mask is still recommended. In addition, fully vaccinated people should still get tested if experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and should not visit private or public settings if they have tested positive for COVID-19 or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.

If you are not fully vaccinated yet, or are unable to take a vaccine, keep wearing your mask. Children under 12, for whom there is not yet an approved vaccine, also should keep wearing masks around others not in their immediate household. Additionally, for the thousands of Marylanders with compromised immune systems suffering from conditions like certain blood cancers or organ transplants,

please err on the side of caution for masking, even after being vaccinated, as research is still inconclusive on the effectiveness of the vaccines for this patient population.

Let's also keep up the [frequent hand washing](#) and other good hygiene precautions that have kept annual [influenza](#) at historical lows and generally reduced the spread of all kinds of germs and bacteria.

This has been a rough year. [Too many lives have been lost](#) and others [irrevocably changed](#) by this virus. We all want to find out what the new normal will look like, but let's not throw all our masks in the trash before we really are done with this pandemic.

Wearing a mask really has never been about politics. It's been about caring enough about your family, your neighborhood and others in your community to keep everyone safe. The pandemic may end eventually, but [caring for others](#) should go on.

Thank you for doing your part and continuing to wear a facemask when appropriate. Stay safe.



Ben Cardin

P.S. If you still need to get vaccinated, go to <https://www.marylandvax.org/> to find a clinic location near you, or check with your doctor's office or local pharmacy.